

## CANADA 2: *LONG POINT NATIONAL WILDLIFE AREA,* *ONTARIO*

### *Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands*

**Effective Date of Information:** The information provided is taken from the List of Canadian Wetlands Designated as of International Importance, May 1982 updated by the Canadian Wildlife Service – Ontario Region in October 2001.

**Reference:** This was the 2nd Ramsar site designated in Canada.

**Name and Address of Compiler:** Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0H3.

**Date of Ramsar Designation:** 24 May 1982.

**Geographical Coordinates:** 42°35'N., 80°15'W.

**General Location:** Situated on the north shore of Lake Erie in the Regional Municipality of Haldimand-Norfolk near the town of Port Rowan, Ontario.

**Area:** 13 730 ha.

**Wetland Type (Ramsar Classification System):** *Inland wetlands:* Type Sp - permanent freshwater ponds, marshes, and swamps; Type W - freshwater swamps; Type Xf - freshwater swamp forest.

**Altitude:** Average altitude is 174 m rising to 183 m in the sand dunes.

**Overview (Principal Characteristics):** The Long Point is a long slender sandspit extending 32 km into the deepest part of Lake Erie. The peninsula is a series of alternating ridges separated by ponds and swales. Water depth between the ridges is greatly influenced by lake levels.

**Physical Features (Geology, Geomorphology, Hydrology, Soils, Water, Climate):** The peninsula was formed primarily by easterly longshore currents transporting sand from the eroding cliffs further west. Along the north shore of Long Point, erosion and deposition occur in a westerly direction. The climate of Long Point is influenced by the moderating effects of Lake Erie, meaning that spring and summer temperatures are lower than the adjacent mainland, and fall and winter temperatures higher. Mean summer temperature is 22°C and mean winter temperature 1°C. Annual precipitation is 860 mm.

**Ecological Features (Habitats, Vegetation):** Long Point is a unique combination of habitats: beach, sand dunes, grass-covered ridges, savannas, woodlands, wet meadows, rush swales, wooded swamp, tamarack-cedar ponds and deep shallow marshes. The thermal moderation caused by the lake, combined with the southern geographic location of the point, allows a number of plants and animals to survive at the northern fringe of their range. The wetlands at the base of the point represent an older more stable successional stage compared to those on the peninsula and include wooded swamp, shrub swamp, grassy and cattail marsh.

## Land Tenure:

**(a) Site:** Ownership is divided among a number of organizations and governments. Federal government - Ontario Region: Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada (2 440 ha). Provincial government - Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (820 ha) and Long Point Region Conservation Authority (220 ha). Also navigable water of the inner bay (7 280 ha), private waterfowl hunt clubs including the Long Point Company (3 210 ha), and other private ownership (40 ha).

**(b) Surrounding Area:** The Ramsar site is bordered by Lake Erie to the south and private lands in the Municipality of Haldimand-Norfolk to the north of the Inner Bay.

**Conservation Measures Taken:** Lands administered by the Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada have been designated as National Wildlife Areas under the *Canada Wildlife Act* since 1973 (the Big Creek National Wildlife Area since 1973 and the Long Point National Wildlife Area since 1978). Lands administered by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources are designated either as provincial park or controlled through the *Public Lands Act*. The Long Point Region Conservation Authority owns and administers its property under the *Conservation Authorities Act*. The extensive wetlands of the Long Point Company have been protected and managed since 1886. The wetlands of Long Point are zoned as Environmental Protection Areas under the official plan for the Regional Municipality of Haldimand-Norfolk but this does not ensure protection.

**Conservation Measures Proposed:** None currently.

## Current Land Use/Activities in:

**(a) Site:** The two National Wildlife Areas administered by the Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada are managed to protect their value for wildlife. The Long Point National Wildlife Area is managed as a wilderness area with little interference in the dynamic forces of nature and limited public use. Some restorative measures may be undertaken to rectify adverse impacts caused by past human activities. The Big Creek National Wildlife Area is managed primarily as a waterfowl migration staging area. The Big Creek Marsh has been historically managed for waterfowl hunting and muskrat harvesting. Management activities include water level manipulation in two impoundments and the creation/maintenance of interior channels in the remainder of the marsh to facilitate waterfowl. Muskrat and other furbearers are trapped under National Wildlife Area permits and waterfowl hunting is permitted in a portion of the National Wildlife Area. At certain times of the year, sport fishing, canoeing, wildlife viewing and use of a dike-top trail with an observation tower are also permitted.

The Inner Bay at Long Point is one of the province's most popular sport fishing areas for smallmouth bass and other game species. The provincial Crown marsh is utilized for fishing, boating and wildlife viewing. It is managed by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources in the Fall as a waterfowl hunting unit. The marsh

areas owned by the Long Point Region Conservation Authority and private owners are managed for waterfowl hunting purposes.

**(b) Surrounding Area:** The Town of Port Rowan and the communities of St. Williams, Booth's Harbour and Long Point Beach are located around the Inner Bay. The mainland area of the Regional Municipality of Haldimand-Norfolk is a mixture of privately-owned agricultural and forested lands.

### Threats to Integrity of:

**(a) Site:** Direct threats to the unprotected wetlands are primarily proposals to convert the marshes to agriculture or recreation. Marina developments and trailer parks that service the large boating public have increased and the construction of channels to service private cottages requires rigid control.

Long Point commonly receives precipitation that has a pH of about 4.0 during some periods of the year. Environmental pollution from the industrial area on the shore of Lake Erie to the east and from Great Lakes shipping is a constant concern. Other threats include possible off-site developments which could interfere with the littoral drift and transport of sand that forms Long Point or by artificial manipulation of the water level of the Great Lakes. Severe storms can overwash the barrier beach damaging the wetland, and high water levels accelerate erosion.

The lands owned by the private waterfowl clubs are managed for waterfowl hunting and are not at present considered in danger of loss. Escalating land costs, however, could materially affect their status. The Canadian Wildlife Service and Nature Conservancy of Canada have the right of first refusal to those lands still owned by the Long Point Company.

**(b) Surrounding Area:** Outside the area, there are continuing pressures for recreational developments, notably marinas and housing.

### Hydrological/Physical Values:

### Social/Cultural Values:

**Noteworthy Fauna:** Tundra Swan *Cygnus c. columbianus* traditionally uses the marshes extensively during spring migration with about 50% of the population east of the Rocky Mountains passing through the area in spring and a lesser number in autumn. Puddle ducks and other species of diving ducks use the region in large numbers. The area is of national significance to many other migrating birds and since the establishment of Long Point Bird Observatory in 1960, 237 species or 75% of all species recorded for Ontario have been observed. A total of 115 bird species are believed to have nested on Long Point including Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* and Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus* (both endangered), King Rail *Rallus elegans*, Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* and the rare Prothonotary Warbler *Protonotaria citrea*.

There are 31 recorded species of mammals, 26 species of reptiles and amphibians including five species considered threatened in Canada and 114 species of fish native to Lake Erie, many utilising the waters in and around Long Point at some time in their life-cycle. At

least 60 species have been recorded on Canadian Wildlife Service property alone. A variety of invertebrates occurs, including meadow crayfish *Cambarus diogenes* which is one of Canada's rarest invertebrates. The area is also on a migration route for bats and monarch butterflies *Danaus plexippus*.

#### **Noteworthy Flora:**

**Current Scientific Research and Facilities:** A permanent research station has been operated by the Long Point Bird Observatory to monitor migratory birds since 1960 and the Canadian Wildlife Service surveys waterfowl populations annually. A number of graduate theses and other studies have been undertaken on a variety of biological topics. The Long Point Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Station was established in 1989.

#### **Current Conservation Education:**

**Current Recreation and Tourism:** Visitor facilities and camping are available in a local provincial park; a viewing tower and trails are present at Big Creek National Wildlife Area adjacent to Long Point.

**Management Authority:** Multiple - including Canadian Wildlife Service, Environmental Conservation Branch, Ontario Region, Environment Canada; Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources; Long Point Region Conservation Authority; and Long Point Company.

**Jurisdiction:** Partially federal - Environment Canada. Partially provincial - Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Partially private.

#### **Selected Bibliography:**

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**Reasons for Ramsar Designation:** The wetlands and associated sand dune ecosystem of Long Point are the best remaining examples of their type in the Great Lakes basin. The whole spectrum of dune and wetland succession is easily discernible along the region's length. The area is renowned as a staging area for waterfowl in spring and fall and is one of the most important areas of waterfowl concentration in Ontario. The marshes and adjacent waters of Long Point Bay can contain at one time during peak migration up to 100 000 or 11% of the total population of Redhead *Aythya americana* and at least 43 000 or 14% of all Canvasback *Aythya valisineria*.

**Status of Management Plan:** The *Long Point National Wildlife Area: Management Plan* was released in March 1983. A management plan for the Big Creek complex was also completed in 1984.